

“Your generation will determine the strength of our democracy and the success of our economy in the global marketplace.”□

**Washington, DC** – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.) delivered the commencement address at the **University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)** this **afternoon to the graduating class of 2010. Below is the text of the address:**

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“Good afternoon, graduates. I am happy to be here with you, your parents, your loved ones, and your friends to celebrate your attaining one of life’s milestones—a college degree, undergraduate or advanced.

“I am particularly pleased to be here with my dear friend Freeman Hrabowski—one of America’s greatest college presidents. His passion for UMBC, for its students, for academic excellence, for mathematics, science, engineering, and technical disciplines have earned for him and for UMBC recognition throughout our State and country. You have been advantaged here by your experience at UMBC and by the leadership of your president and the extraordinary faculty who have taught you.

“Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote in his poem, ‘Ulysses’: ‘I am a part of all that I have met; / Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough / Gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades / Forever and forever as I move. / How dull it is to pause, to make an end, / To rust unburnished, not to shine in use, / As though to breathe were life.’

“It is that same excitement for life and challenge that I know you have had ignited here at UMBC. Your country needs that energy, that quest for excellence, that engagement, that willingness to challenge convention: to discover, to invent, to compete, to accomplish, and, yes, sometimes to fail, but not to give up.

“Your generation will determine the strength of our democracy and the success of our economy in the global marketplace. Graduates, most of you have been leaders throughout your lives. Today, you are judged as having met expectations. Today, as well, expectations of your future role have been heightened.

“By the time you are sitting in your parents’ seats, when you look back at the country you’ve helped make, the credit or the blame will sit with you, too. There is nowhere else to put them. That is democracy’s most radical idea.

“So we are all judged for the justice with which our country carries out its business, for the dignity with which we treat the poor and dispossessed. So a democracy’s most important word is ‘we’: the ‘we’ who liberated peoples and polluted our earth; the ‘we’ who watched New Orleans drown and entered burning, collapsing buildings on September 11<sup>th</sup>; the ‘we’ who walked on the moon. We, the people, are not a business transaction, but a community of equals. We are partners in the quest to form a more perfect union.

“Today we see an increasing stridency in the public square, an abandonment of civility that coarsens and undermines our partnership as citizens. It can be a danger to the reasoned discourse so necessary for democracy’s success. I hope that has troubled you as much as it has me.

“Our citizens’ partnership is crucial to our country’s success. Honor your opponents as partners, even when they exasperate you. You have spent a lifetime educating yourselves and you’ve earned a right to your beliefs. Whatever they are, don’t hold them fearfully—hold them with confidence. Hold them confidently enough to put them to the strongest test, to poke and prod them, to put them in the fire. Hold them confidently enough to stand by them in the face of ridicule—and to give them up in the face of facts that persuade you and are consistent with what your conscience allows.

“Remember that our partnership is more than politics, and stronger than politics. In the distance you travel between your seats and the parents’ seats, this country of yours will change unimaginably—but no matter who’s in and who’s out, it will always be yours. And remember that those men and women who have made this venture more just, and more perfect, have so often been those who were proudest of the joint stake they held. On that thought, let me relate the story of Marian Anderson:

“In 1939, Marian Anderson was one of the world’s greatest opera singers. But she was banned from singing under any concert hall’s roof in our nation’s capital, because she was a black woman. So instead, on Easter Sunday, she stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and performed for an audience of 75,000, outdoors. She didn’t begin with a famous opera aria, as she usually did; she sang a song that everyone in the crowd already knew by heart: ‘My country, ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.’

“In that crowd of 75,000 was a ten-year-old boy who, in the summer of 1963, would stand on those same steps and speak of his ‘dream deeply rooted in the American Dream.’ Marian Anderson and Dr. King, and the thousands who came to hear them: if anyone had the right to say that their country had been taken away from them, they were the ones. They were Americans disowned by their country, who might have disowned it in return. But they chose to love it instead in its imperfections, to call it instead to live up to its purpose and its promise. My wish for you is that you love your country in the same way.

“Graduates of UMBC, you are our very best—uniquely qualified and trained to lead and succeed and make a difference in so many ways in this century that lies ahead.

“Congratulations and Godspeed!”

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